

10 June 2022

Eoin Rush
Director of Children Services
East Riding of Yorkshire
Room HS136
County Hall, Cross Street
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Dear Eoin

Monitoring visit to East Riding of Yorkshire local authority children's services.

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to East Riding of Yorkshire children's services on 4 and 5 May 2022. This was the fourth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in December 2019. Her Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Vicky Metheringham, Matt Reed and Teresa Godfrey HMI Designate.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- The quality of analysis and action planning following strategy discussions.
- The quality and consistency of social work assessments and children's plans.
- The timeliness and effectiveness of pre-proceedings work.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. This visit was carried out on site. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including children's electronic case records, performance management information, reflective space auditing activity and other information provided by senior leaders. In addition, inspectors spoke to a range of staff including social workers and managers.

Headline findings

East Riding of Yorkshire children's services have continued to improve since the local authority was judged to be inadequate in December 2019. There has been notable progress made in the quality of social work practice and the pace of improvement has accelerated since the last visit. Enthusiastic and motivated social workers undertake improved social work with children and their families.

A determined and stable leadership team knows its service extremely well. Leaders are clear where improvements have been made, informed through their improved line of sight to practice. They are outward facing, and external scrutiny and review is

supporting their improvement journey. Leaders have developed a realistic plan to embed improved consistency of social work practice and their practice model. As a result, children and their families benefit from more focused interventions and support from their social workers. Their improvement journey is underpinned by the continued corporate support and additional investment.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Timely and well-attended multi-agency strategy meetings are convened when risks to children escalate. Detailed information is shared, which enables risks to children to be understood within the wider context of historical information and provides a rationale about the next steps. Appropriate decisions and actions are made to protect children. However, some actions lack timescales, which means that it is not always clear when the work needs to be completed by.

Managers appropriately escalate section 47 child protection enquiries. Child protection enquiries collate appropriate information from partner agencies to inform next steps. Improved direct work with children and families is completed by social workers as part of the child protection enquiries. Children are seen frequently by social workers who develop meaningful relationships with them. Children are seen on their own and their experiences and worries are considered. Records of child protection enquiries are detailed and clear. Social workers proactively put immediate safety plans in place to reduce and manage risk. However, a small number of safety plans are not developed closely with parents, which means that expectations can be unrealistic for these families.

The availability of the police to undertake joint visits to some children impacted on the timing of the child protection enquiry. As a result of this, and workload pressures for social workers and children's independent reviewing officers, some children's initial child protection conferences took place outside of the statutory timescales. During this interim period, regular and frequent visits continued to be made to children and safety plans were established. However, these children had not benefited from co-ordinated multi-agency planning and they experienced a delay to information-sharing about the management of risk and safety.

Assessments of children's needs by social workers have significantly improved. They are analytical, informative and provide a clear sense of the child's world and their experiences. The impact of family history and how that affects the child's current circumstances is understood. The views of adults and an assessment of their parenting capacity are provided. Children's assessments are frequently updated and take account of emerging issues which inform children's plans. Not all assessments for children are timely. Leaders are aware of this and have taken steps to increase staff capacity. Case sampling by inspectors on this visit where assessments have not been completed in time did not identify children left in unsafe circumstances.

Children's plans are reviewed through regular and well-attended multi-agency child in need and core group meetings. This ensures that plans are updated to reflect the child's individual circumstances. Most children's plans provide an overview of how risks will be managed, which are contained within safety plans that are increasingly completed with

the family and young person. However, children's plans do not consistently identify the specific needs of the individual child and lack timescales, making it difficult to know how plans are meeting the child's individual needs and to assess and monitor how progress is being made.

Senior leaders very recently commissioned a peer review into the quality and impact of their pre-proceedings work. They have immediately begun to progress the recommendations of this diagnostic. As a result, inspectors identified improvement in this area during the visit. The recent appointment of the interim strategic lead for children's social work is beginning to further strengthen the apparatus to support the pre-proceedings process. In turn, this is enhancing the quality of practice improvement driven by the principal social worker and other leaders. A greatly improved public law outline tracker has been established which is tracking and reviewing children subject to a pre-proceedings process. In addition, a strengthened care planning panel is making appropriate and timely actions because of enhanced social work assessments and earlier management oversight. Recent improvements have been made to the letters before proceedings. They now provide families with an understanding about the support and opportunities to make effective change to avoid legal action being taken.

A stable and permanent senior leadership team is continuing to improve social work practice for children. A well-informed self-evaluation by senior leaders provides a clear description of where progress has been made and where continued challenges remain. Leaders maintain a methodical approach to the implementation of the changes required to improve social work practice. The pace of improvement activity is underpinned by scrutiny and challenge by the Department for Education improvement adviser. Children's services are well supported through strong and visible support from the corporate management team, elected members, partners, and external peer support. The additional investment is enabling the evolving infrastructure and system changes to drive the development work.

Recruitment and retention challenges are continuing to affect the workforce stability and the impact and outcomes for areas of social work practice. The approach to 'grow your own' has resulted in the local authority projecting it will be fully staffed by summer 2022. In addition, the significant financial investment in developing a creative workforce offer is supporting organisational culture change which staff appreciate. The workforce and their well-being are valued by senior leaders who engage and communicate frequently with workers.

Effective performance management systems provide senior leaders with a greater ability to scrutinise and monitor data so that they can swiftly identify issues of concern. A significantly improved line of sight on the quality of practice to senior leaders continues to inform their self-awareness. The recent self-assessment for this visit together with improved oversight of data show continued synergy, which means that the local authority knows itself well.

Social workers value being involved in the reflective space activity which is supporting the development of the quality of their practice. Senior leaders ensure that themes and patterns identified through reflective space audit activity are communicated to social

workers to help them with their practice. A consistent theme identified is that the model of practice is not consistently used to inform social work interventions with families.

Staff are well supported by visible and approachable team managers who provide them with support and guidance. However, not all social workers experience consistent and frequent supervision. Longstanding challenges to recruit and retain staff have meant that some social workers have high workloads, which impacts on their ability to work effectively with all families. Social workers report they have access to a wide variety of training and development opportunities, which has a positive impact on their practice. All the social workers that inspectors met are positive about working for the East Riding of Yorkshire children's services.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Vicky Metheringham
Her Majesty's Inspector